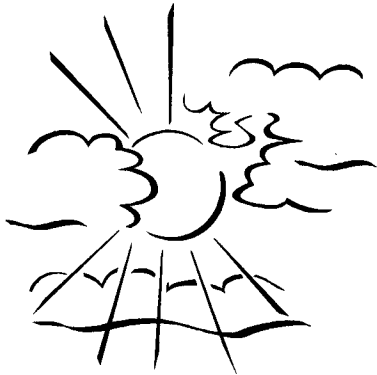


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Monday, August 1, 2005

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Minimum wage divides workers, bosses, politicians

Proponents of higher hourly pay in Michigan want the measure on the ballot in November '06

By Charlie Cain, Mark Hornbeck and Joel Kurth / The Detroit News

the income scale, this will soon boil down to a classic argument between two camps: those who believe increasing the minimum wage will give hundreds of thousands of workers a fuller and more dignified life, and those who think the government has no business setting the price of labor.

Michigan Democrats, who have been unable to get their plan for a \$2 increase in the state's \$5.15 minimum wage through the Republican-controlled Legislature, hope to put the issue before voters next year.

Polls indicate it would pass, and Democrats hope the issue would give their overall ticket a boost in November 2006.

Prospects of a pay boost for the first time in eight years is welcome news to Jean Boudrie, a Monroe senior who is working a minimum-wage job to supplement her Social Security income.

"If they bump up my pay \$2 an hour, that frees up money to pay at least two monthly bills, like utilities or groceries," said the 70-year-old receptionist. "As it is, the minimum wage is just a hair above volunteer work."

Opponents, however, say workers at the bottom of the pay scale would be hurt by raising the minimum wage, because employers faced with higher costs would be forced to reduce the number of jobs. Michigan's unemployment rate has been among the nation's worst for months.

"It drives up the cost of entry-level jobs and increases the cost of doing business in Michigan at a time when company profits in the state are already shrinking," said Wendy Hofmeyer, a lobbyist for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. "Thousands of entry-level jobs will be left out of the marketplace."

The U.S. Labor Department estimates that 460,000 workers in the state would get a raise under the plan: 88,000 are at the minimum wage and another 372,000 earn less than \$7.15 an hour.

They include Calaundra Knight of Detroit, who was nine months pregnant with her first child when she earned her GED. She's seven months pregnant with her next child and recently earned a certificate to work as an office assistant.

She's worked in a host of jobs for menial pay since she was 16. Most recently, she waited tables at a Bob Evans Restaurant in Livonia for \$2.65 an hour. Some days, she'd bring home \$65 a day in tips. Others, it was about \$7.

"Making \$5.15 an hour is OK if you're a little kid going to school, but you can't live on it if you're on your own," said Knight, 23. "Another \$2 might not seem like a lot, but it adds up. And that means, if you have experience, other jobs probably would pay more too."

Unlike many people, Knight has no safety net of relatives. Her mother has AIDS. Her father has been out of the picture for years. She and her son, Joseph Jenkins, 2, live in a friend's house and get by with public assistance and odd jobs such as hairstyling.

It isn't enough. One day last week, Knight said she only could afford to eat a candy bar and bag of chips.

"Sometimes, when you're in the slums, you get determined," Knight said. "I don't want to be on aid. I'm not above it, but it's a struggle when you don't have anyone else. ... I'm looking for jobs, trying to hide my (pregnant stomach.) I wanted to get a job before I was showing too much. I want to work. I want to be working when my water breaks. I'm tired of living off other people."

"My grandkids won't even rake the leaves in my yard for \$5.15 an hour," said Sen. Ray Basham, D-Taylor, the lead sponsor of the Senate version of the minimum wage raise bill. "We have people who are working and still living in poverty, and that's unconscionable."

If a petition drive to put the issue before voters succeeds, Michigan would join 15 other states that have raised their bottom pay above the federal basement. Democratic activists say Michigan could be one of as many as 10 states to have the issue on the ballot in 2006.

"We will play as large a role as needed to pass that ballot issue," said Mark Gaffney, president of the Michigan State AFL-CIO. "Right now we are hosting the strategy meetings and talking about raising money through our affiliates. We will be a partner in the effort."

Gaffney said it's "a fairness issue and a Michigan economic health issue," since workers who stand to gain a \$4,000 raise through a boost in the minimum wage would spend that money in Michigan.

Voters in four states have considered minimum wage hikes since 1997 and all have been approved. Last fall, 71 percent of Florida voters passed a measure that took the minimum wage to \$6.15 an hour.

EPIC/MRA of Lansing conducted a poll of 1,000 voters this month that showed Michiganians in favor, 72 percent to 22 percent. Pollster Ed Sarpolus said a minimum wage proposal on the ballot next year could increase Democratic turnout 3.8 percent, or 180,000 voters. The issue could do for Democrats what gay marriage ban proposals did for Republicans on last fall's ballot.

The governor's office and all 148 legislative seats are up for grabs next year, as well as the U.S. Senate seat held by Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Lansing Democrat.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, called "cynical" a strategy that uses the minimum wage issue purely for electoral politics. But he added that Republican candidates shouldn't shy away from taking a stand against raising the wage.

"The voters of Michigan want our state to be more competitive -- they know business costs are high here," he said.

DeRoche added that there is an employability issue that hasn't been a part of the debate.

"Some people may only be employable at \$5.15 an hour at certain stages of their life when their productivity is limited ... when they're entering the work force, or in the later years of their work life, or maybe they have a physical or mental impairment," he said. "They may not be employable at \$7.15 an hour."

"It's great to say you want people to make more money, but how about those people you're sending home?"

The minimum wage boost is supported by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who said in her State of the State address this year "it's only fair to our workers -- many of whom are supporting families on \$5.15 an hour, below poverty line wages ..."

Amber Caldwell, a 22-year-old single mother of four from Lansing, agrees. She works at a Rally's restaurant for the minimum wage.

"The simple fact is the minimum wage is very hard to live on," Caldwell recently told lawmakers. "The cost of living is so high."

"When you're in our position, it seems like politicians don't want you to get ahead. They don't live off the minimum wage so it doesn't bother them. They don't think about it every day like we do."

Tommy Brann, who owns nine restaurants including Brann Steakhouse and Grille eateries in Sterling Heights and Northville, said the wage hike measure "would just kill us." He said wages should be set by the marketplace rather than mandated by government.

"We pay at least \$6 an hour for our dishwashers and we pay more if they're good workers. That's the way the system is supposed to work," Brann said.

Brann has 700 employees and 10 percent to 15 percent earn less than \$7.15 an hour, he said. If the minimum wage is increased, he'll likely have to hire fewer people and cut managers, he said. The 35-year veteran restaurateur especially opposes boosting pay for tip earners from the current \$2.65 minimum to \$4.60 an hour. He said his waitresses and waiters can earn \$20 an hour in tips. Hofmeyer at the Chamber of Commerce said passage of the proposal would give Michigan the third-highest minimum wage in the country -- behind Washington at \$7.35 and Oregon at \$7.25 - - and the highest in the Midwest.

"A lot of companies may have to shut their doors if they're forced to pay higher wages than they can afford," she said.

The countless studies on the impact of minimum wage increases arrive at conflicting conclusions. Some say a boost in the wage leads to a loss of entry-level jobs and does not benefit low-income breadwinners. The increase is more likely to lure teens from affluent families into the job market, they report.

But other research suggests that the last federal minimum wage increase in 1997 did not lead to a loss of jobs. In fact, states with minimums higher than the federal standard saw greater increases in employment over the past few years than states that are at the federal minimum, the studies indicate.

Rebecca Blank, dean of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan and co-director of the school's National Poverty Center, says significant numbers of workers will benefit from a minimum wage increase. Many of those will be former welfare recipients who have been pushed into low-wage jobs by welfare-to-work reforms.

"The most likely person to be earning minimum wage is a low-skilled woman," Blank said.

"That's a group that is clearly going to see some impact."

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Mom's self-sufficiency plans stall

Purchase of lemon car drained savings, health plan for kids cut too deeply into paycheck.

By Joel Kurth / The Detroit News

Vakena Cummings almost had it made.

Working extra hours at Burger King last year, Cummings cobbled together about \$900. A few hundred dollars more and she'd be able to put down first and last month's rent and a host of deposits for an apartment.

Instead, she bought a car at an auction for \$400. She soon learned it needed \$1,000 in repairs. Cummings drove it for a week before a wheel flew off on the Lodge Freeway.

The dreams of self-sufficiency were stranded in the breakdown lane along with the wrecked 1989 Pontiac Grand Prix.

"I made \$5.35 an hour and that's barely enough to get me to work in gas," said Cummings, 21, who lives on Detroit's northwest side. "Now, I have to borrow money from family members just to get by. You know if it's the first of the month, I'll be coming over to your house to borrow money."

Cummings quit Burger King after signing up for a health care plan to care for her 2-year-old twins, Zipporah and Zakil Jackson. The plan cost \$100 every two weeks, reducing her biweekly paycheck to less than \$300.

Now on public assistance, Cummings took classes at the National Institute of Technology to work in medicine. She hasn't found a job and lives with the fraternal grandparents of her twins. Their father does some roofing work and odd jobs, but doesn't have a steady income, she said. "Raising the minimum wage to (\$7.15) an hour would make it a little easier," she said. "You won't live well, but you could get a little bit more. If you work eight hours a day, that's an extra \$16.

"That would help. You can't feed a dog on \$5.15 an hour. I know, because we have a little pit bull and he's greedy."

Cummings buys shoes at Payless Shoe Source, rides the bus and scrimps.

"All those things keep going up, but minimum wage has stayed the same," Cummings said.

Sunday, July 31, 2005

Jean Boudrie, clerical worker
Clerical job helps pay bills
Grandmother, 70, finds covering bills a
challenge even with working to augment
Social Security.

By Mark Hornbeck / The Detroit News

MONROE -- Jean Boudrie just couldn't get by on her \$432-a-month Social Security check.

So the 70-year-old Monroe homeowner and grandmother found a minimum wage clerical job at the Monroe County Opportunity Program, which helps low-income residents become self-sufficient.

Now she nets about \$800 a month, but it still isn't enough to pay all the bills. "I love my job. But it's impossible to exist on minimum wage," she said.

"A gallon of milk costs between \$3 and \$4. That may not seem like much to most people, but it's about what I take home for one hour of work. When I have to fill the gas tank in my car, it takes more than half a day's wages."

Boudrie gets around in a patched-up, 15-year-old Plymouth Sundance she's afraid to drive more than five miles from home. Just when she's about to catch up on her bills, an increase in property taxes or insurance rates puts her behind again. She gets federal Medicare health care coverage, but her \$5.15-an-hour job pays no benefits, so she pays out of pocket for medications.

Her plight has made Boudrie an activist about raising the minimum wage.

"I want what everyone wants: security, the ability to help my children and grandchildren, the chance to get ahead and not to have the worry every day about what might go wrong," she said. "I can't have those things as long as I earn the minimum wage. It's time our state showed workers like me that in Michigan we value work."

Restaurateur fears hike's ripple effect

Proposed \$2 increase is unaffordable for him and would impact all hourly wages, Arby's owner says.

By Mark Hornbeck / The Detroit News

July 31, 2005

FARMINGTON HILLS -- Mark Mitra already pays workers above the minimum wage at his four Arby's restaurants in Metro Detroit.

But he's worried that if the state jacks up the bottom wage by \$2 an hour, it'll have a ripple effect that would ultimately boost pay by a similar amount for his 75 managers and hourly employees.

"If the minimum wage goes up, it ratchets everybody up, in their minds," said the 49-year-old businessman. "If \$5.15 an hour goes to \$7.15 an hour, then \$7 an hour goes to \$9 an hour."

Given the razor-thin profit margins in the fiercely competitive fast-food industry, that would mean trouble for his business, commented the Northville father of two.

"That is an unaffordable proposition for me," Mitra said.

Employee wages and benefits are No. 2 on Mitra's list of business costs, right behind food. He has Arby's restaurants in Farmington Hills, Canton, Van Buren Township and Commerce Township that he has owned for 12 years. He's now scouting locations to open more restaurants. Andy Deloney, lobbyist for the Michigan Restaurant Association, added that the proposed hike in the tip wage from \$2.65 to \$4.50 an hour would severely hurt many other restaurateurs in southeast Michigan.

An owner of two restaurants in Oakland County would have to shell out more than another \$80,000 in the first year to waiters and waitresses who are already earning \$18 to \$25 an hour in tips, Deloney said. He cited another owner of six Metro Detroit restaurants who would have to pay an additional \$586,000 a year.

"Where will that money come from to pay higher wages to people already making good money in tips?" Deloney said. "That's a very large increase in labor costs."

Scrimping single parent doubts \$7.15 is answer Fast-food worker sees recently earned medical assistant certificate as her way out of poverty.

By Joel Kurth / The Detroit News

Tina Jarvis buys meat once a month, clips coupons and practically knows the Dollar General clerks on a first-name basis. Still, the bills keep on coming.

Unlike her wages, they just keep on growing.

There's the \$50 a month she'll have to start paying in August on a \$3,000 student loan for classes that haven't helped her get a better job. Car insurance is \$124 a month. Add in another \$180 every month to repay DTE Energy for bills she fell behind on last year.

All on about \$6 an hour working the cash register and making subs at Bellacino's Pizza and Grinders in Livonia.

"I barely make it," said Jarvis, 36, of Redford Township.

"I look for sales. I use the coupons. I return bottles and get a lot of my stuff at the Dollar General, but I always worry about my bills. I live with stress, just wondering how I'm going to pay them all."

A single mother of a 10-year-old son, Michael, Jarvis has spent much of her adult life behind a fast-food counter. She's a veteran of McDonald's, Tim Hortons and Hardee's.

The most she ever made was \$7.50 an hour -- roughly \$16,000 a year or about \$3,000 above the federal poverty line.

Jarvis gets by with help from her grandparents, who own her home, and welfare. Among other assistance, she receives \$274 a month in food stamps. Yearning for more, Jarvis last year enrolled in a 30-week class to earn a certificate as a medical assistant.

She graduated, but has yet to find an employer willing to hire a 36-year-old with no practical experience.

"I grew up on welfare," she said. "I always swore I wasn't going to raise a child on welfare. I don't want to, but when you're a single mother making (near minimum wage) it's hard. I just wish someone would take a chance on me."

An increase in the state minimum wage to \$7.15 an hour may put a few extra dollars in Jarvis' pocket, but she doubts it would change her quality of life.

"The more you make, the more they take out in taxes," she said. "I know you get most of it back at the end of the year, but most people need it every week."

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Published July 31, 2005

Lay me down to sleep ... on my back, by myself, without my toys

Medical experts offer tips to help save babies from suffocating in their sleep

By T.M. Shultz
Lansing State Journal

Local death investigation teams know more today than ever about how Lansing-area babies are dying in their sleep.

They're suffocating in their cribs against hand-knitted blankets, too many pillows and beds jammed with teddy bears.

Babies in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties also are dying as their tiny bodies slip into couch crevices and cushions.

And defenseless infants nestled in beds with their parents are dying as adults weighing up to 20 times more roll on top of them.

The stark irony: Often those who love them the most are unwittingly tucking them into bed each night - then leaving them in peril.

"It's astonishing how easy it would be to fix," said Dr. Stephen Guertin, director of pediatric intensive care at Sparrow Hospital. "It doesn't require far-out, sophisticated technology."

In Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties, five babies died in their sleep in 2002; four in 2003 and three last year, according to the Michigan Public Health Institute, a nonprofit group that manages the state's Child Death Review program.

Of those 12 deaths, one was ruled sudden infant death syndrome, and three were unexplained.

Eight suffocated.

Guertin - a national pediatric expert - said parents can keep their babies alive as they slumber by following seven rules:

SAFE SLEEP SEVEN

- A baby should sleep alone - never with adults or other children because of the danger of rolling over on a tiny infant and either suffocating them or compressing their rib cage so they can't breathe. To keep your baby close, consider a crib or bassinet in your room or next to your bed for easy breast-feeding at night.

- A baby should sleep on his or her back. Tell this to child-care providers, grandparents, anyone who might put your baby to sleep. Every sleep time counts - even naps.

- A baby should sleep on a firm mattress with a tight, fitted sheet. Research has shown that placing a baby to sleep on soft mattresses, sofas, sofa cushions, water beds, sheepskins or other soft surfaces greatly increases the risk of death.

- Don't put items in the crib - not even toys or blankets, which can suffocate an infant.

- A baby's face should always be uncovered. Dress the baby in a "sleep sack" to avoid the need for other covering.

- Don't smoke around a baby or wear smoky clothes. A recent study showed that nicotine interferes with a brain protein key in breathing.

- Avoid overheating. Dress the baby as you would dress. Your baby's room should be at a temperature that is comfortable for an adult.

Sources: Dr. Stephen Guertin, medical director of the Sparrow Regional Children's Center and director of pediatric intensive care at Sparrow; the University of Michigan Health System; and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Related articles:

- [Parents recall tragic day infant found dead in crib](#)
- [Death rate higher for black babies in Ingham County](#)

- A baby should sleep alone - never with adults or children.
- A baby should sleep on his or her back - never on the stomach or side.
- A baby should sleep on a firm mattress with a tight sheet - never in a water bed.
- Nothing should be in the baby's sleep area - not even a blanket.
- A baby's face should be uncovered.
- Don't smoke around the baby - don't even wear smoky clothes.
- A baby should never be overheated.

Bed-sharing examined

One of the most frequently broken rules for sleeping babies: letting them sleep alone.

"Sleeping with your baby puts your baby at unnecessary risk," Guertin said.

Parents typically take their babies to bed to comfort them as they cry, for bonding and to feed them. Experts say babies who die in their parents' beds are often squeezed so tightly they can't breathe or they're smothered. Cases also have been reported of defenseless newborns suffocating under the breast of their exhausted nursing mother, who dozed off.

In 2002 and 2003, Michigan Death Review teams examined the cases of 253 babies who died unexpectedly in their sleep, according to a state report.

Of those, more than half - 132 - were sleeping with others.

"A family does not forget such a loss," said Kimberly Fiero, a nurse and medical examiner investigator for the Ingham County Health Department.

Bed-sharing is a controversy waged in mothering magazines and in the writings of experts across the nation.

Joan Nelson, who works in health education in Lansing neighborhoods, says there are safe ways to sleep with babies.

"Sober, nonsmoking adults on an appropriate surface constitutes a safe and nurturing environment for infants," she said.

Not safe: sleeping with babies on couches, water beds and soft mattresses, Nelson said.

Launching a campaign

To help save lives, Ingham County is launching an education effort with about \$40,000 in state money. The cash is coming because Ingham is one of 11 Michigan counties with high death ratios between black and white babies. Three times more black babies die per 1,000 live births than white babies.

The money will help teach families, day-care providers, hospital workers and others how babies should sleep, said Sandra Frank, executive director of Tomorrow's Child/Michigan SIDS.

Ingham Regional Medical Center sends new parents home with pamphlets for grandparents, baby sitters - anyone who might put the baby to bed. Nurses also teach parents.

Sparrow Hospital does that, too: Jessica Cox of Okemos and her husband, Kevin, read up about parenting before their daughter, Leah, was born July 21.

But they were surprised by what they learned after Leah was born. They didn't know foam sleeping wedges are a no-no.

So are crib bumpers - a common shower gift for new moms and dads. And the pretty blankets friends and relatives gave Jessica for her new baby can kill.

"As long as I can use them when I'm holding her, I don't feel like I'm going to offend anybody," Jessica Cox said.

Detectives learning more

As death investigation teams figure out why babies die in their sleep and more parents carefully put their little ones to bed, experts say SIDS cases are dipping.

SIDS is a sudden, natural death that's unexplained after an investigation.

So when deaths are ruled strangulation or suffocation, they fit into those categories, instead of SIDS.

In Ingham County, teams - including a health department worker - go to the scene of a baby's death to investigate. Clinton and Eaton counties look at infant death reports monthly but don't have health department workers assigned to go to the scene.

"The Death Review teams are doing a better job, and so are the police," said Lynda Meade of the Michigan Public Health Institute.

New father Kevin Cox said knowledge is key.

"Read up and get as much information as you can, because parenting is going to be the biggest trip of your life."

Guertin says sleep-related baby deaths are easily prevented, but it's tough without a widespread change in habits and an aggressive national campaign.

"We need to do the same thing we did with seat belts," he said.

"That's how you take an epidemic of early childhood deaths and you defeat it."

Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or tshultz@lsj.com.

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Parents recall tragic day infant found dead in crib Mom who helped put her baby to bed in 1985 says 'we did all the wrong things'

Peggy Gray and Ken Jones had just 24 days with their infant daughter Michelle Elizabeth back in 1985.

Twenty-four days of bright good mornings.

Twenty-four days of sweet good nights.

Twenty-four days of love and laughter with their smiling, sandy-haired second child.

"I remember that I thought life was perfect," Peggy said.

Then came Feb. 14.

Peggy and Ken - who lived in Lansing at the time - woke up realizing the daughter they called Shelley Beth hadn't cried in the night needing to be fed.

"We thought she had slept through the night for the first time," Peggy said.

When Ken went to his infant daughter's room and pulled back the covers, he found Shelley Beth on her tummy at the foot of the crib.

He turned her over and he knew: As a paramedic, Ken had been on two sudden infant death syndrome calls in his career. He started CPR as Peggy dialed 911.

"I remember it as being the longest time of my life, although I'm sure they were there in minutes," Peggy said as tears begin to roll down her cheeks.

Ken had taught CPR to the firefighters who arrived at his home that day.

"I remember the look on their faces," Ken said.

Peggy still has guilt.

"I believe that, had we known then what we know now, she'd still be with us," she said. "We did all the wrong things."

They put Shelley Beth - whose death was ruled SIDS - to sleep on her stomach, bundled up in warm clothes, with pillows, blankets and a bumper guard all inside her crib.

"We don't revisit it every day," Ken said.

"Not with this depth of emotion," Peggy quickly adds. "But for me, not a day goes by that I don't think about it."

Their oldest daughter Jesse - 2 1/2 at the time - also suffered.

"She didn't just lose a sister, she lost her parents for about a year," Peggy said.

Now the entire Dimondale family - including two other children born after Shelley Beth's death - celebrate her brief life each year for 24 days.

On her birthday they set out her pictures, bake a cake and light a candle in Shelley Beth's honor.

For 24 days, they light the candle.

Twenty-four days of precious memories.

Twenty-four days of bittersweet pain.

And then - each year on Valentine's Day - they blow the candle out.

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Death rate higher for black babies in Ingham County New campaign to use \$40,000 to prevent deaths

By T.M. Shultz | Lansing State Journal

Black children in Ingham County are dying as a result of unsafe sleep practices at a higher rate than white babies and at a rate higher than the national average of about two to one.

The rate is three to one in Ingham County. Ten other Michigan counties also have high ratios, said Sandra Frank, executive director of Tomorrow's Child/Michigan SIDS.

The highest of those 11 is Saginaw County at 5.3; the lowest - Washtenaw County at 1.8, Frank said.

Because of the disparity, Ingham County will soon receive about \$40,000 in state money to get the word out to the community about safe sleep practices.

The reason black babies are dying at a higher rate isn't clear, said Dr. Dean Sienko, Ingham County Medical Examiner.

"I don't believe we have a good explanation for that," he said. "It's a very complicated issue."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says a 1998 survey of mothers found that black mothers were more likely than white mothers - 54 percent compared to 11 percent - to put their babies to sleep on their stomachs, which isn't safe.

The CDC also suggests some parents may not be able to afford firmer mattresses or own enough beds for every family member.

Dr. Alane Laws-Barker, a Lansing obstetrician, said socioeconomic status may play a role.

"We know that the average income of a black household is significantly less than white households," Laws-Barker said.

Education is the key, she said: "I don't think African-Americans get the information they need." Some local agencies can help.

Lansing's Christian Services, for example, will provide families with a crib if needed, says Kimberly Fiero, a medical examiner investigator for Ingham County.

Even without a crib, a baby can be put safely to bed, Fiero said. She suggests using a portable crib, such as a Pack 'n Play, or a bassinet.

To get help

If you can't afford a crib, these places offer help:

- Shared Pregnancy Women's Center, 484-1882
- Pregnancy Services, 332-0633
- Christian Services, 394-5411

Source: Capital Area Community Services

Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or tshultz@lsj.com.

'I'm afraid' Officials see kids slipping away, dream of good they could do with a better facility

Sunday, July 31, 2005

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Two weeks before David's 17th birthday, Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home Director Frank Weichelin looks at him with a mixture of fatherly affection and fear.

"He's smart," Weichelin says. "And he's got that personality quotient that he could do anything. "But I'm afraid."

He's afraid the county home has failed a kid he's learned to know only too well: David has been detained there more than 40 times, returned again and again for charges involving selling drugs and smoking pot. As soon as he's 17 and legally an adult, David and youths like him too often become the human fallout of a limited program hemmed in by a crowded, outdated facility, Weichelin says.

"I don't want to see him in an orange jumpsuit" of an adult jail or prison inmate, Weichelin says of David, whose real name is not being used in this story because he is a juvenile.

Voters will decide Tuesday whether they agree with Weichelin: that the county needs a new juvenile home to provide the additional room for long-term programs such as job training, drug-addiction treatment, classes to change destructive thinking patterns and extended involvement of troubled families. The average homeowner's property-tax bill would increase \$25 if voters approve the nearly half-mill tax proposal for a new juvenile home and expanded jail.

A similar request was soundly defeated three years ago. Since then, nothing has changed.

Kalamazoo County's juvenile home is clean and well-staffed.

Its vine-covered, brick front on Gull Road has the benign appearance of a campus dormitory. But its space and design, Weichelin says, is for "habitation, not rehabilitation" that the children there need.

CONTINUED

'I'm afraid' Officials see kids slipping away, dream of good they could do with a better facility

Page 2 of 3

On a recent morning, a 13-year old girl is led out of the home in handcuffs and shackles for a Family Court hearing. Her mother and grandmother both have tested positive for methamphetamine. David's mother was murdered by her boyfriend when he was 2 years old, and he lives with his grandmother. The stories go on.

"We have a very small percent of kids who are here all because of the kids themselves," Weichelin said. "We've got some pretty broken families that need to be brought into the equation."

A new juvenile home would add 24 beds, at least 16 of them for youths needing long-term treatment. Those long-term programs would incorporate the youths' families and possibly their schools after they leave the home. That's not possible now because the 40 beds are all needed for comparably short-term detention, Weichelin said.

It's not that troubled youths in the county can't get treatment in long-term residential programs. Some 20 to 30 county youths at a time are treated in Iowa, Indiana, Arizona and Grand Rapids. Saving money would be only part of the rationale for adding capacity at the county juvenile home for long-term residential programs, Weichelin says.

"If we could keep kids here, we'd incorporate parents, grandparents and guardians" in programs, Weichelin says. "The families are critical."

Some counseling is provided now, but caseworkers meet with the youths in the staff lounge or other makeshift space.

There's a gym where David likes to do push-ups and play basketball. But the gym is not air-conditioned, and the heat is stifling.

There is nothing for juveniles with mental illness at the home, and few other places here that can take them.

"We closed Pheasant Ridge," the state children's psychiatric hospital once located on Oakland Drive, Weichelin says with frustration. Even though juveniles with mental illness respond to a different kind of treatment than the other youths and can be violent against themselves and others, he has no separate area for them.

The suicide-watch room is a stripped-down former reading room, where on a recent day a boy lies in a fetal position on a mattress on the floor, a thin blanket pulled over his head.

Page 3 of 3

But most of the youths at the juvenile home are not mentally ill. They have different problems, like David.

"A whole lot of stuff got to change," David says. He's proud that he's earned enough merit points for good behavior to wear a red T-shirt and call his grandmother three times a week.

"She misses me," he says.

He's determined to make a clean break with his past. Maybe he could get a job mowing grass for \$8 an hour, he says hopefully.

"What I would really like to do is join the Air Force," he says.

Weichelin is uneasy about David's future, musing over the what-ifs had there been a juvenile home such as the one proposed.

"Maybe we could have treated him residentially here, and worked on job skills and drug problems" for six-month periods instead of a few weeks, Weichelin says. Maybe he could have taken more technical, hands-on classes. Maybe there could have been earlier intervention into David's life.

"Maybe we could have been more of a surrogate parent," bringing David and his grandmother to the home after his release, he says.

"Once you've been here as many times as he has, it kind of loses its impact."

A little later in another wing of the home, a baby-faced 14-year-old kneels obediently on a chair while a security guard gently locks shackles around his ankles. Convicted of armed robbery, he is on his way to the state youth prison.

Standing up with the guard's help, the youth says goodbye to supervisor Joanne Jones, a 28-year staff veteran.

Then he gives her a tender hug, like a son would his mother.

"These kids come here with issues, and these issues are developed long before they get to us," Jones says after the youth is led away.

Some rob to help their parents pay the bills, or for food or drugs. Most get little or no consistent guidance or discipline from home, she says. She would try to intercept the problems at a younger age.

"They don't get the help they need until it's too late," she says.

Sunday, July 31, 2005

Her son goes wrong; Mom wonders why

By Neal Rubin / The Detroit News

Family reunion, 1993. The kids put on a talent show, and 9-year-old Roummel Ingram named all 66 books of the Bible, Genesis to Revelations.

Today, he's in the Oakland County Jail.

His mom can show you a newspaper clipping from his sophomore year at Ferndale High. He was the student of the week, a star athlete taking honors history and math.

Bail is set at \$1 million.

The friends he was with on July 5 call him Ro. His older sister calls him Romeo, though he doesn't much like it. The rest of his family called him Poopsie when he was young, then switched to Dumpling. Sometimes his mom calls him Melly-Belly, and just saying it aloud makes her laugh.

According to their confessions, he and two buddies robbed the Mug & Jug Fine Wine & Liquor Shoppe in Farmington Hills, and Melly-Belly shot the clerk.

I know the store and I know the victim, who's improving daily, and I wondered a few weeks ago about the background of the shooter. Wasn't there someone in his life to teach him basic values? If there was, when did he decide they didn't matter?

Carlene Ingram, 55, took offense. She wasn't angry or loud about it, but she was firm, and she wanted me to know that she had tried. So we sat at her dining room table and she showed me clippings and a Bible and some DVDs that say rap music is a tool of the devil, and she said the officers who arrested her 21-year-old son July 13 were impressed with his manners.

"From kindergarten through eighth grade," she said, "I did a Bible lesson with my son every month."

Mrs. Ingram lives in a neat brick house on a street full of them in Oak Park. Roummel had a bedroom in the basement. *Has* a bedroom: As his mother pointed out, "He's not convicted yet."

When your child might be looking at life in prison, you take things a day at a time, grasping for optimism whenever you can. But it wasn't that long ago she thought Roummel was heading for grand things.

The clipping laid flat on the mustard-colored tablecloth said his role models were Donovan McNabb and Johnnie Cochran, a quarterback and a lawyer. It said he wanted to go to college and become an attorney.

Not long afterward, he needed one. He was a caddy at a country club, Mrs. Ingram said, and the club brought in a Jeep as some sort of prize, and Roummel didn't mean to steal it. He just wanted to take it for a drive.

The first arrest seemed to break the seal on whatever was bottled inside him, and trouble spilled out regularly from there. He was still a good child, though, Mrs. Ingram insisted, and things weren't as bad as they seemed.

He didn't really assault his girlfriend, the mother of his two infants; he just threw her cell phone. He didn't mean to violate probation; it was a paperwork problem. He wasn't making trouble the time he drank that 40-ouncer; his girlfriend was mad at him, so she called police.

Farmington Hills police chief William Dwyer, looking at Roummel's file a few days later, read off arrests for things such as disorderly conduct and reckless use of a firearm. "It fits the pattern," he said. "To me, it looks like he has continued to be more aggressive in his crimes."

In the dining room, Mrs. Ingram insisted otherwise. "He got with a crowd," she said. "I tried to tell him, 'Roummel, you don't need them.' But he's like, 'They're my partners.' "

That's all she can figure; he fell in with the wrong people. His senior year he quit football, and he never applied to college. Maybe it didn't help that her husband, Ray, died two years ago, but Roummel was already sliding.

Mrs. Ingram kept going to church and kept inviting her Bible study leader to the house. A few weeks ago, Roummel joined them upstairs. He took notes in pencil on the back of a sheet of paper, writing down citations: Galatians 5:19-21, Psalm 34:14.

He prayed with them, Mrs. Ingram said, and he told her he'd go to church with her on Sunday. The next day, he was arrested and charged with six felonies, including assault with intent to murder.

I asked Mrs. Ingram if she thought his sudden reverence was a byproduct of remorse. "I don't know," she said, but she praised the heavens that he joined her, and at least for a night, it felt like she had her little boy back.

Eaton County court guardian

July 31, 2005

being investigated

By KURT MADDEN
Lansing Community
Newspapers

CHARLOTTE — An attorney who acts as court-appointed guardian for 150 people unable to manage their own financial affairs is being investigated for possibly embezzling funds.

Charles M. Zwick, 56, became the target of a investigation by several police departments after hundreds of thousands of dollars were unaccounted for in a case involving a 93-year-old Alzheimer's patient.

Zwick, a well-known Charlotte attorney, failed to attend a hearing July 22

in Eaton County Probate Court during which it was revealed he had closed several bank accounts and did not explain what he did with the money.

Probate Judge Michael Skinner, and Philip Vilella, the attorney for the victim's estate, attempted repeatedly to reach Zwick by phone, fax and e-mail.

Zwick is seen almost daily in the Eaton County Court system because of the number of cases he has handled over the years. He has not been seen since July 19, according to court records.

A judgment for \$342,054.26 was entered against Zwick by Judge

Skinner on July 22 for Sandra Ranville, a Holt resident and the woman's sole heir.

Skinner, in making his ruling, said gross mismanagement was obvious, and it was possible that embezzling occurred.

Eaton County Prosecuting Attorney Jeff Sauter attended that hearing as an observer. Sauter said Tuesday, July 26, "A multi-agency investigation is in progress, led by the Charlotte Police Department. Charlotte is assisted at this time by investigators from the Eaton County prosecutor's office, Eaton County sheriff department and the Michigan State Police."

Zwick's role is described as the county's guardian, said Michael Kutas, administrator for circuit and probate courts. Many of his cases involve people who are receiving Social Security and Medicaid payments, Kutas said.

"This is a very unusual situation. Charlie is a fixture here. He is very well known, very popular, very unassuming and low key. He is one of those guys who has been here a long time before many of the judges took the bench. He has a large caseload, and everybody knows him," Kutas said.

"What makes the whole situation suspicious is

that Charlie is not here to answer the key questions," Kutas explained.

Zwick had the responsibility to look after the financial affairs, including bill paying, for people the court determines are unable to make decisions, Kutas said.

He said Tuesday there is no evidence of wrongdoing or mismanagement with other court-appointed cases, and said another guardian would be sought to handle key bills for the other wards of the court.

Ranville, whose mother died last August after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, formally asked to have Zwick removed as her mother's official guardian when financial irregularities were discovered.

Among the suspicious activities were:

- withdrawing more than \$320,000 from several bank accounts and failing to account for the money;
- failing to pay real estate taxes for the woman's home for two years and leaving her home uninsured for six months;
- reporting that the woman's income taxes return were completed, but providing no evidence they were filed;
- failing to account for what happened to the woman's automobile.

Court documents show some of the irregularities occurred as early as 2001, the first year he began handling the woman's affairs. In one instance, Zwick withdrew \$84,828 the State Employees Credit Union and closed the account but did not explain what he did with the money.

Man who used senior's identity faces sentencing

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION Sunday, July 31, 2005

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

A Burton man will be sentenced Aug. 23 for opening a credit card in the name of a blind Flushing nursing home resident in 2002.

In exchange for Tiso V. Deer's plea to possession of a fraudulent transaction device, the state attorney general's office dismissed five counts of illegal use of the credit card.

All the charges are 4-year felonies. Deer could get probation, jail time or prison, and will likely be required to make restitution, authorities said.

Deer, 25, who appeared with his attorney, Sam A. Terry, told Genesee Circuit Judge Geoffrey L. Neithercut at his arraignment and plea that he got the information for the credit card from someone else.

Police and prosecutors said the incidents occurred in September and October 2002 and allege that Deer opened a credit card in the victim's name and spent \$500.

He was never employed by the victim's home care agency.

Earlier, a spokesperson for state Attorney General Mike Cox said the theft was discovered last year through the "It's MI Identity" campaign, which helps senior citizens review their credit reports.

Deer remains free on a \$7,500 bond.

- Paul Janczewski

WZZM13 Greater Grand Rapids News Coverage GR METRO NEWS

Andrew Delancey

Created: 8/1/2005 5:36:08 AM

Updated: 8/1/2005 5:36:08 AM

Jenison - Sentencing is today for a woman convicted of first degree child abuse at her Ottawa County daycare.

Diane Robinson was found guilty of abusing a 5-month old in her care in Jenison.

The child was nearly comatose, and had bleeding and swelling on the brain.

Robinson faces 15 years in prison at today's sentencing.

Children must be protected

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CLIO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION Sunday, July 31, 2005

JOURNAL READER

I am writing in regards to the article in The Flint Journal on July 7 about the father accused of hitting his 5-week-old child ["Father charged with felony in child abuse case," Genesee County, Page A4].

The article said this was the fifth child the state (Children's Protective Services) took from the couple and that caseworkers alleged that at least some of the other children had been physically abused.

Who is watching out for these poor kids? Why was this woman allowed to leave the hospital with that baby? I think that someone needs to be held accountable.

It is bad enough that the couple are allowed to continue to have children everyone else is expected to raise. But when we give them the chance to abuse another one, that shows a definite problem with our system.

Kathy Burris

Clio

Couple Accused Of Locking Child In Dog Cage

Foster Parents Allegedly Try To Discipline Girl

POSTED: 8:21 am EDT July 29, 2005

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, Mich. -- Two foster parents are accused of putting a 9-year-old girl in a dog cage as a form of discipline.

The Clinton Township couple is expected to face charges of second-degree child abuse Friday for the alleged incident, according to Local 4.

Police said the girl asked permission to go to a friend's home, but the foster parents would not allow her to go. The child ran away, and the foster parents went to retrieve the girl from the neighbor's house, Local 4 reported.

The parents then allegedly put the child in a large dog crate and left the house for about an hour in an attempt to teach her a lesson, according to the station's report.

The parents returned and released the girl, who returned to the neighbor's house and told them what occurred. The neighbors called police.

The girl and another child who live in the foster home were placed in protective custody. The children were not harmed, according to Local 4.

Neighbor Eric Gochlowski said the discipline allegedly used by the foster parents would have never entered his mind.

"That's uncalled for," said Goclowksi. "I can't even think of using my hand to discipline my kid, let alone stick him in a box."

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JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker (517) 373-7394

Kids, cars and hot weather can be deadly combination

August 1, 2005

During the hot and humid summer months we hear terrible stories of children dying as a result of being left in a locked vehicle. That is why Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski believe it is the opportune time to remind parents that children should never be left in a vehicle alone.

Each year, approximately 30 children die – nationally and in Michigan – as the result of being trapped in hot vehicles. On a warm, sunny day, even at temperatures as mild as 60 degrees, a closed vehicle can heat up to dangerous levels in minutes.

"Heat-related child deaths are disturbingly high," Udow said. "Many of those deaths occur when a child is left alone in a vehicle on a hot day. Parents may think they could never forget their child is with them, but if a child is being dropped off at school or day care, and that is not part of a daily routine, it can happen."

Children should never be left alone in a vehicle, not even to run a quick errand. State and local prosecutors can file criminal charges of child endangerment against an adult who leaves a child alone in a car, even if for just a minute.

"Sometimes parents are in a hurry and think it will be okay to run into the store or the gas station quickly while leaving children in the car," Udow said. "A vehicle can be a very dangerous place for a child, regardless of what the temperature is outside."

Concern over this issue is not limited to the Department of Human Services. Soaring temperatures have also prompted the Michigan Department of Community Health to draw attention to the dangers of hot weather.

"Temperatures inside vehicles on sunny, summer days can reach dangerous levels within minutes, and leaving children unattended inside can lead to deadly consequences," Olszewski said. "When left unattended in a hot vehicle, it can take just a few minutes for a young child's core body temperature to increase rapidly, causing permanent injury or even death. This is a serious public health issue, and one that is entirely preventable."

-MORE-

There are several safety precautions that parents can take to ensure that children are not injured while in a vehicle. Some of those precautions include:

- ◆ Never leave your child unattended in a motor vehicle, even with the windows down.
- ◆ Teach children not to play in, on or around cars.
- ◆ Always lock car doors and trunks, even at home, and keep keys out of reach of children.
- ◆ Watch children closely around cars, particularly when loading or unloading items.
- ◆ Always make sure all child passengers have left the car when you reach your destination.
- ◆ Don't overlook sleeping infants.
- ◆ Be wary of child-resistant locks and power windows and teach older children how to disable the driver's door locks if they unintentionally become trapped in a motor vehicle.
- ◆ When restraining children in a car that has been parked in the heat, check to ensure seating surfaces and equipment are not overly hot.
- ◆ Upon leaving your vehicle, use a light covering to shade the seat of your parked car and consider using windshield shades in front and back windows.
- ◆ Keep rear fold-down seats in an upright position to prevent children from getting into the trunk from inside the car.
- ◆ Contact your auto dealership about getting your vehicle retrofitted with a trunk release mechanism.

"A little prevention goes a long way where children are concerned," Udow said. "The steps you take now to protect your children will not only help them live long and happy lives, but teach them to protect their own children the same way one day as well."

For more information about how the DHS works to protect children, visit the DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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State asks for recall of explicit game

By LINDSEY POISSON

The State News July 29, 2005

Legislators announced Wednesday that they will ask the manufacturer of "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" to recall the video game and will ask state retailers to take it off their shelves. After discovering the game had encoded sexually explicit scenes, which could be unlocked from the Internet, the game went from a "mature" to an "adult only" rating last week.

Don Hazaert, spokesman for the Senate Democratic Caucus, said 59 major retailers were asked to voluntarily remove the game so children can't purchase it.

"We are asking them to do that, and the governor is asking them to do that," he said. "They were sent a letter asking that they pull that game off the shelves."

Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, said there are no laws prohibiting game makers from creating such scenes, but lawmakers can restrict underage people from buying it.

"A 10-year-old could go in and purchase or rent 'Grand Theft Auto,'" she said. "There's gang violence, automatic rifles, and you can pick up scantily clad women."

The scenes in question depict sex in many different positions, Hazaert said.

"Grand Theft Auto" isn't the only game that has questionable content but is being used as an example, Angerer said.

Scott Reschke, owner of Fast Repair and Game Center, or FRAG, 543 E. Grand River Ave., said sensitive content in video games isn't new.

"If you look at a military game, they're tearing off limbs, which in my opinion is 10 times worse," he said.

Many local retail stores already request photo identification with the purchase of mature- or adult-rated games, Reschke said. Stores such as Best Buy, Circuit City and Office Max have already taken the game off the shelves, he said.

Angerer said there aren't set restrictions prohibiting the sale of video games to children, but she has proposed legislation to create them.

At FRAG, video games with sexual content are not available for customers to play.

"I don't put any sexually explicit games on the systems," he said. "I just avoid that issue entirely by not supplying it."

Richard Dunlap, a 16-year-old customer at FRAG, said he played "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas." He said he didn't know there were sexually explicit scenes in the game and never attempted to view them.

Dunlap said he plays video games as a recreational activity when he's not outside or after a long day of military school.

Reschke said the situation doesn't call for legislation.

"It's just a rallying point for Granholm," he said. "If they're able to do this to a particular game, you'll be able to do that to a particular movie, a particular song, a particular artwork."

Decisions, such as what video game is appropriate to play, need to be made within a family setting, Dunlap said.

"We elected the government to help us, but a simple household decision should be left to the parents," he said.

States move toward lifetime GPS tracking of sex offenders

By David A. Lieb / Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- Technology that helps the military align targets and motorists find their way is being tapped to track some sex offenders forever.

Spurred by headlines of released sex offenders accused of murder, some states are mandating use of the Global Positioning System for tracking. Many lawmakers see electronic monitoring as a natural evolution of statutes that already require sex offenders to register their addresses with authorities.

At least four states -- Florida, Missouri, Ohio and Oklahoma -- passed laws this year requiring lifetime electronic monitoring for some sex offenders, even if their sentences would normally have expired. Similar bills have been proposed in Congress and other states, including Alabama and North Dakota.

But some civil-rights experts and defense attorneys contend such requirements are too onerous and attach the stigma and inconvenience of electronic anklets and GPS transmitters to those who may never commit a crime again.

GPS monitoring makes sense for a small group of high-risk offenders, evaluated case-by-case, said John La Fond, a law professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and author of the recently published book "Preventing Sexual Violence."

"A law that requires that everyone who has committed a crime against a young child should be subject to lifetime locator technology is simply foolish," La Fond said.

After a registered sex offender was charged in March with killing 9-year-old Jessica Lunsford, Florida legislators quickly mandated tougher prison sentences for people who commit sex offenses against children and required lifetime GPS monitoring after serving time.

Missouri Sen. Matt Bartle liked the Florida legislation so much that he copied and expanded it to include repeat sex offenders who commit crimes -- such as exposing oneself to a child -- that would otherwise be punishable by seven years or less of imprisonment.

Bartle said he intentionally cast a wide net.

"I think the general public is really not terribly confident that we're getting it right when it comes to pedophiles -- that this individual case-by-case approach is leading to some very horrific situations," he said.

A new Oklahoma law also requires habitual sex offenders to wear GPS monitoring devices for the rest of their lives. Ohio's budget funds lifetime GPS monitoring only for people classified as sexually violent predators.

Many other states use GPS monitoring for selected people on probation or parole but the monitoring ends with the sentence.

People on the tracking system must wear the electronic waterproof ankle bands at all times and stay within a certain distance from their separate GPS transmitters, which can be carried on belts, in purses or set down on desks and tables when at work or home. The transmitter is about 3 inches long and tall and 1 1/2 inches wide.

Part of what makes the technology attractive is the ability to trigger automatic alerts to law enforcement authorities -- by e-mail, cell phone text messages or faxes -- anytime sex offenders

approach off-limits areas like a school or stray from their designated route between work and home.

Local authorities also have the ability to pinpoint a person's location at any moment -- shown as a dot on a computer map that contains street names and the offender's traveling direction and speed.

Pro Tech Monitoring Inc. already uses GPS technology to follow about 5,000 people on parole, probation and house arrest in 38 states, said Richard Nimer, its vice president for business development. He said inquiries about offender tracking services spiked nearly fourfold after Lunsford's death.

The GPS technology is not foolproof, however.

Authorities in Boise, Idaho, say paroled child-sex offender William Lightner cut off a GPS bracelet and fled on July 23. Near Tallahassee, Fla., Kenneth Lamberton was wearing a GPS monitor awaiting a child-molestation trial when authorities allege he tried to force one girl into a sex act in March and another to expose herself in April.

Both men had been assigned passive GPS devices that send information once a day. Florida is switching to the active GPS devices, which instantly alert authorities to any violations.

Florida's experience shows offenders on GPS tracking are less likely to get in trouble than those under traditional supervision. The state Department of Corrections followed about 16,000 offenders placed on community supervision in the 2001-2002 fiscal year, including more than 1,000 under GPS monitoring.

Two years later, the department had revoked the community release of 31 percent of those on GPS monitoring, compared with 44 percent of those under traditional supervision. Nearly 6 percent of GPS-monitored offenders had committed new felonies or misdemeanors, compared with 11 percent of those who were not electronically monitored.

Lifetime electronic monitoring may be preferable to lifelong stints in mental-health institutions, said Jack King of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. But rather than targeting entire categories of criminals, states should mandate it after individual hearings, he said.

Kansas City civil-rights attorney Arthur Benson already is challenging Missouri's lifetime sexual offender registry.

"While these laws are often couched in terms of protecting the public against repeat offenses, at heart they are vengeful, punishing acts," Benson said.

On the Net:

Sex Offender Center: <http://www.csom.org>

Defense Lawyers: <http://www.criminaljustice.org>

Published July 30, 2005

Frantic mother could save only 1 child Smoke prevented rescue of brothers in Lansing blaze

Tracy Burton
Lansing State Journal

Melanie Washington woke up Thursday morning racing against time.

She and her husband, Herbert, jumped out of bed when they heard their 4-year-old son screaming "Help! Help! Daddy!" from upstairs on the ground-level floor, where he was with his brother and sister.

Fire was quickly consuming their north Lansing home. Washington, blinded by the black smoke filling the house, lost sight of her husband as they raced up the basement stairs. She went back down, broke a window in their bedroom and ran outside to the front door, plunging into the smoke again.

She made it to her 6-year-old daughter, Trisha. The little girl stood wrapped in a blanket, waiting for someone to help, Washington recalled through tears as she stood outside the charred home Friday afternoon.

But the Washingtons never made it to the two boys. Corey Blocker Jr., 8, and Tyreek Washington, 4, died together in a back bedroom.

It may be up to a week before investigators determine the cause of the fire, which burned the boys beyond recognition.

"I really don't accept this," Washington, 29, said, pointing to a window boarded up with plywood. "This is where my kids died."

Overcome by heat

After leading Trisha outside, Melanie Washington tried to get back in but was overcome by the heat and smoke billowing out the door. She listened closely for the boys but couldn't tell where they were.

She heard one more faint scream. And that was it.

She believes it was 4-year-old Tyreek, who loved Legos and was just about ready to have the training wheels removed from his bicycle.

To assist the family

- Funeral arrangements for both boys are pending through Gorsline Runciman, Lansing Chapel.

- Contributions may be mailed to the family at:

302 Thomas St. Lansing, MI 48906

He was going to be in kindergarten this fall - joining his brother at Cole Academy, a Lansing charter school.

"If you were having a bad day, he'd bring a smile out of you because he had a little smile that would just cheer you up," his mother said.

Corey, 8, loved to play GameBoy but loved basketball even more.

"He was better than his dad, his uncles," Washington said. "His dream was basketball."

Both boys loved SpongeBob SquarePants, she said.

"Corey was so smart. He was so curious. ... He wanted to find and figure out everything."

Recovering

Neighbors and relatives were at the house Friday helping Washington salvage items, including a bag of cassette tapes, jewelry and a basket full of clothes.

An insurance agent surveyed the damage.

A strong smoke odor lingered. Bikes were stacked on each other in the grass not far from shattered glass. And a burnt Strawberry Shortcake blanket lay near the front door.

All fire officials know is that the blaze started in the kitchen area, next to the room where the boys were found, Firefighter Ignacio Centeno said.

Washington's mother, who lives next door, is the one who called 911 after the fire broke out. She suffered a minor heart attack that day and is hospitalized.

Herbert Washington suffered smoke inhalation and was released from the hospital Friday.

Melanie Washington's 10-year-old son, Domanic, was not home at the time of the fire.

Washington said she grew up on the dead-end street and that her neighbors have really come together for the family.

"This whole block has just been our life," she said while holding two white roses a little girl brought to her.

One for Tyreek.

One for Corey.

Contact Tracy Burton at 377-1206 or tburton@lsj.com.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Child support amnesty program to begin October 1

August 1, 2005

Beginning October 1 people who owe past due child support will have a 90-day window to avoid state criminal and civil enforcement penalties under a new law providing for a time-limited child support arrearage amnesty.

"We know that payment of child support is a good indicator that a parent will remain active in the lives of their children," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the DHS Office of Child Support. "We want to do everything to encourage that involvement and this is an opportunity for parents to get current in their child support payments without the fear of penalties."

Beginning Oct. 1, anyone who owes past due support can submit a completed "Child Support Amnesty Request Form" to his or her local Friend of the Court office. The request must be accompanied by at least half of the past due support owed. Any remaining past-due child support must be paid by the end of the amnesty period on Dec. 31.

Participants will have no state criminal or civil enforcement penalties initiated for the duration of the program. Penalties that have already been initiated will be waived with the exception of felony prosecution that has been initiated or if the payer has already been arrested based on a criminal or bench warrant related to the payer's failure or refusal to pay past due child support.

The amnesty program was established by Public Act 564 of 2004 and sponsored by Rep. Alexander Lipsey to coincide with child support month in October.

"This program facilitates the basic purpose of the child support system – providing financial support to children," said Rep. Lipsey, of Kalamazoo, who initiated and guided the law through the state legislature. "Through it, good faith payers can fulfill their obligation; children will receive much needed funds, and we will not waste jail space on cash strapped payers."

The amnesty program does not affect current support obligations. Income withholding orders for collection of current support will remain in effect during and after the amnesty program.

To obtain a Child Support Amnesty Request Form with instructions or for more information regarding the program contact your local Friend of the Court office, go online to www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on "Child Support", or call toll-free 1-866-540-0008.

Ann Arbor region again has lowest jobless rate

June rate drops slightly to 4.4%

Friday, July 29, 2005

BY SCOTT ANDERSON News Business Reporter

The Ann Arbor region showed the lowest unemployment rate among Michigan's metro areas in June, a month which also saw a decrease in the number of people searching for jobs.

The Ann Arbor area's June rate dropped slightly to 4.4 percent from 4.7 percent in May, while the unemployment rate compared to a year ago showed even more improvement, moving down from 5 percent.

June's seasonally unadjusted unemployment rates decreased in 15 of Michigan's 17 major labor markets, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The local region, which is composed solely of Washtenaw County, was lower than the national average of 4.9 percent and the state of Michigan average of 6.9 percent, unchanged from May.

Unemployment in Livingston County edged up to 5.5 percent from 5.1 percent in May.

As with much of the state, total payroll jobs in the Ann Arbor area were flat during the month of June. The most significant change came in the government sector, which decreased by 1,200 jobs over the month mostly due to seasonal layoffs in state employment and as local schools decreased student workers and other staff for the end of the school year.

But nearly all other industry sectors showed job gains, offsetting the drop. Professional and business services added 600 local jobs from the previous month to top the list of growth sectors.

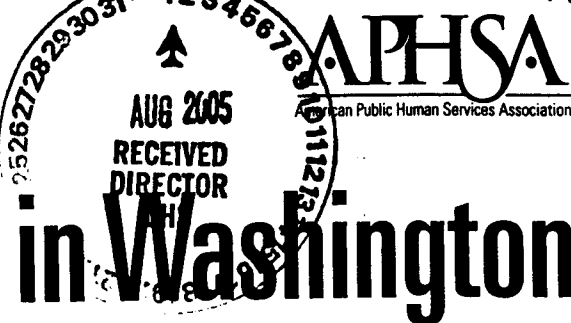
Construction jobs grew at a healthy 3.4 percent, while leisure and hospitality grew 1.4 percent.

The manufacturing segment reported 900 fewer jobs, with the majority of decreases coming from the auto industry. All other industries noted modest or no change.

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(from Marianne Udow)



in Washington

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Medicaid Commission Holds First Meeting

On July 27, the Medicaid Commission, created by the administration to find potential savings in the Medicaid program, convened for its first meeting. Michael Leavitt, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), said that given the short timeframe, he is not expecting the commission to propose substantially new approaches on how to trim \$10 billion from Medicaid over the next five years. Rather, he emphasized the potential for new ideas to form during the commission's second phase, from September 2005 until its final report is due December 1, 2006. In the short term, he suggested that the commission review proposals that already have been made by other groups to find a solution. Leavitt said of the current state of Medicaid, "There is a point in the life of any big problem where it is big enough that you can see it but small enough that you can still solve it." The commission determined that it will meet once more in August (probably August 17 and 18) before the September 1 deadline for its short-term recommendations report. The commission's chairman and vice chairman, former Gov. Don Sundquist of Tennessee (R) and former Gov. Angus King of Maine (I) respectively, also made opening remarks. Members of the commission then discussed their backgrounds and their motivations for being part of the commission. They include members of the administration, prominent physicians, health care business leaders, members of the disability community, and representatives of state and local governments. The afternoon session began with two presentations by Martha Roherty, director of APHSA's Center for Workers with Disabilities, and Vivian Riefberg of McKinsey & Co., focusing on current Medicaid issues and the program's viability. Roherty presented background information on Medicaid and the top 10 issues currently facing the program, including that it has grown by 40 percent over the last five years and that it has currently surpassed education as the largest portion of state budgets. Commissioners expressed interest in learning more about the makeup of the 40 percent increase. Riefberg provided data showing that the majority of new enrollees were mothers and children. Commissioners also sought information on how intergovernmental transfers alter the effective matching rates for states. Staff from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services indicated they would work on pulling that data together. Other commissioners pointed out that these numbers could be disputed, given the difficulty in defining and tracking intergovernmental transfers. Other presenters included the American Dental Association, American Nursing Association, American Pharmacists Association, Arc, the Epilepsy Foundation, and Consumers Union among

others. Their remarks followed a similar theme of avoiding cuts to the program that could harm vulnerable individuals. A transcript of the entire meeting is expected to be available in two weeks. All the materials presented at the meeting will be posted on the web site of the National Association of State Medicaid Directors, an APHSA affiliate, under "Medicaid Commission" at <http://www.nasmd.org>.

House Holds Hearing on Methamphetamine Effects

On July 26, the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources held a hearing, "Fighting Meth in America's Heartland: Assessing the Impact on Local Law Enforcement and Child Welfare Agencies." Among the witnesses were Freida Baker, Alabama Department of Human Resources; Sylvia Deporto, Riverside County (Calif.) Children's Services; Betsey Dunn, Tennessee Department of Children's Services; and Valerie Brown, National Association of Counties. Several witnesses testified about the effect meth has had on the children and families served by their agencies and the strategies they have implemented to address the issues. Congressional members at the hearing included Reps. Mark Souder (R-Ind.), the subcommittee's chair; Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), ranking member; Patrick McHenry (R-N.C.); Gil Gutknecht (R-Minn.); Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.); John Mica (R-Fla.); Tom Osborne (R-Neb.); Diane Watson (D-Calif.); Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.); and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.).

House Health Panel Reviews Information Technology

On July 27, the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, chaired by Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.), held a hearing on Health Information Technology (HIT) and its potential to reduce medical errors, improve patient care, and reduce costs. David Brailer, national coordinator for HIT at HHS, led a panel of six HIT experts representing a range of private and public organizations. He provided information on recent HIT developments and ways Congress can best act to ensure continued progress. HHS Secretary Leavitt recently announced formation of the American Health Information Community (AHIC), an HIT advisory committee that Leavitt will chair. Leavitt called for AHIC nominations from the public and private sectors to serve on a 17-member committee to advise him on development of information technology standards and HIT interoperability. Leavitt also released four requests for proposals seeking private-sector guidance on technology standards, certification, confidentiality and patient information security, and development of a national architecture. The hearing testimony is available at <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=detail&hearing=436&comm=1>.

House Meetings Discuss Agriculture Budget Cuts

On July 28, according to news reports, House Agriculture Committee Chair Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) hosted a second round of private meetings with other committee members to discuss the \$3 billion in mandatory spending cuts for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs required by the fiscal year 2006 budget resolution. The cuts could affect federal nutrition assistance programs such as the Food Stamp Program (FSP) and the National School Lunch Program, depending on whether Congress decides to include nutrition programs among those subject to the agriculture spending reduction target. On July 27, during a House Agriculture Committee markup of farm price legislation, Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-N.D.) said he is worried that the cuts to USDA spending will come from nutrition programs, saying "the long knives are out for food stamps." Pomeroy also depicted the private meetings as "an unacceptable shortcut" that would lead to deals that would cut the federal nutrition programs. Goodlatte was quoted as responding that he was committed to examining all programs under the committee's jurisdiction. Goodlatte and other Senate and House Agriculture leadership have met with constituent groups to discuss possible savings scenarios. Authorizing committees are scheduled to report their recommended cuts to the House and Senate Budget Committees by September 16.

Grassley Sends Letter to States On Medicaid Maximization

Last week, Senate Finance Committee Chair Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) sent letters to governors regarding state practices of hiring private contractors and consultants on a contingency fee basis for the development of Medicaid revenue-maximization strategies. The committee is reviewing these arrangements out of concern that they may not be within the law and the generated revenue is not being spent appropriately. In the letter, Grassley requests additional information about states' use of consultants for FYs 2002–2004 as well as information on which departments and agencies received Medicaid reimbursement. In addition, the letter requests that states report on their third-party recovery practices, specifically what mechanisms are employed to ensure that the federal government is reimbursed by third-party payers and the total amount of funds reimbursed to the federal government by third-party payers for FYs 2000–2004. The letter came following a June 28 hearing the committee held on Medicaid fraud and abuse. At that hearing, the director of health care for the Government Accountability Office released a report, *States' Use of Contingency-Fee Consultants to Maximize Federal Reimbursements Highlights Need for Improved Federal Oversight*. That report is available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05836t.pdf>.

Minimum Wage Legislation Introduced in the House

On July 25, Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-N.Y.) introduced the Minimum Wage Competitiveness Act of 2005 (H.R. 3413). The legislation would provide an incremental increase in the federal minimum wage to \$7.15 over a three-year period. The bill was referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee.

Report Urges Action on Individuals With Disabilities

On July 26, U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona released a report, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Improve the Health and Wellness of Persons With Disabilities*. With input from the HHS

Office on Disability, the Call to Action cites the following goals: raising awareness about how those with disabilities can develop and maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle; making health care and support services more accessible to those living with disabilities; and increasing knowledge among health care workers and providing them with methods to diagnose and treat with dignity persons with disabilities. According to Carmona, 54 million persons, or 20 percent of Americans, have at least one disability. Most Americans will experience a disability at some point in their lives, either through a congenital condition, illness, injury, genetics, or other causes. The report is available at www.surgeongeneral.gov.

Head Start Family Literacy Grants Available

On July 25, the Administration for Children and Families announced two Head Start funding opportunities. The first, \$1 million annually for five years, will support a Child Development Associate National Credentialing Program; applications are due September 23, 2005. The second, \$3 million per year for five years, is available for the Head Start Family Literacy Project; applications are due September 8, 2005. Both notices were published in the July 25 *Federal Register* (70 FR 42562–42579) and are available at <http://www.gpoaccess/fr/index.html>.

New Child Well-Being Report Released

On July 27, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released the 16th edition of its *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. The report indicates that five out of 10 child well-being indicators have worsened since 2000. The findings show that there was an increase in the percentage of low-birth weight babies between 2000 and 2002, an increase in infant mortality, and that a half million more children were living in poverty in 2003 than 2000. Indicators that have improved include that the high school dropout rate has fallen significantly from 2000 to 2003; the teen birth rate decreased in 2002; and the percent of children in single-parent households leveled off. The *Data Book* can be accessed at www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/databook.jsp.

Food Stamp Radio Ads to Begin in August

During August and September, USDA will air FSP outreach radio ads in both English and Spanish covering 35 states. The ads will contain information regarding who may be potentially eligible for FSP and will include the national toll-free FSP hot-line number. A complete list of stations airing the ads is at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/radio-buys.htm>.

This Week Goes on Summer Break

Congress had adjourned for its summer break, so *This Week* will also go on break until Congress returns. We will resume publication on September 9.



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